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Cryptic Chapter

By TOM DONNELLY

BACK in 1958 "The Care of Devils," a novel about the CIA by Sylvia Press, was published by Beacon Press. It got absolutely nowhere. A paperback addition has just been published by Bantam. The Bantam people had never heard of the book until it was the subject of a very, very late review by Malcolm Muggeridge in the May, 1966 issues of Esquire.

Miss Press used to be an intelligence officer for the CIA. She had been a CIA employee for 12 years when she was fired in 1954 after undergoing an inquisition markedly similar to the one inflicted upon the heroine of "The Care of Devils." Miss Press was in Washington the other day on a promotion tour arranged by Bantam (First printing: 150,000 copies.) In his Esquire review, Malcolm Muggeridge suggested, ever so delicately, that just possibly the CIA might have bought up that hard cover edition in 1958, which was why it "disappeared" from the bookstores. Miss Press said that naturally she was heartbroken when her book seemed such a failure, but she figured that its "disappearance" was due to "the ineptness of the publishers." She said, "It never occurred to me in all these years that the CIA bought it off the shelves."

I asked Miss Press what evidence there was to show that the CIA had actually done such a thing, and she conceded that the evidence wasn't exactly airtight. "Esquire was planning this issue of espionage and sex," she said, "and a man very high up in Washington told the editor that he ought to get a copy of my book, and that the CIA had suppressed it."

Miss Press has no clue to the identity of this Government big wing. "I don't even know the gender," she said.

Miss Press said she never got any royalties from that first publication of her book: "The weren't enough to cover my advance." The book was

published in Italy, but Miss Press never found out who had arranged for TIAT, and she never got a penny out of the deal. I said, "Didn't you have an agent?" Miss Press said, "Yes, but I didn't want to keep pestering her because I knew she wasn't making any money on me." In 1959 the book was published in England, where it escaped the attention of Malcolm Muggeridge. Miss Press said she did get an advance from the English publisher, and she read some of the English reviews in the periodical section of the public library. They were favorable, she said.

Miss Press said that she had just been commended for a special report written for her CIA bosses when she was, without warning, subjected to "a nightmare" of questioning. "I was never directly accused of anything," she said, "and I never got a straight answer to any question I asked THEM. I even took a lie detector test. That machine went wild. I was a nervous wreck by that time. They asked me questions about every little thing for years back. The results seemed to show that I had given up Communism at the age of 10! I said to the man who was running the tests, 'At least it shows I was one of the earliest disillusioned ones.' I don't know how I managed to keep a little of my sense of humor..."

The episode was straight out of Kafka, Miss Press says, and she doesn't know to this day if the CIA got her confused with somebody else, or if she was being offered up as a sacrifice to McCarthyism. "They could have been playing the numbers game," Miss Press said. "They might have told him, 'See, we're cleaning our own house.'"

"In spite of everything, I'm still in favor of security," Miss Press said. "I don't feel vindictive about the CIA. After all, the CIA is my own government. I made the original publishers agree not to use the name CIA. I feel the real villain is fear... I wrote the book as maybe the CIA is a different organization now..."

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